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**34**

**North Ward**

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I work in Manhattan and live in the North Ward. As news of the outbreak began to dominate headlines in the U.S., my biggest fear was not catching the virus but passing it onto others. In March, I gradually stopped attending in-person meetings and classes. I covered my mouth and nose on the bus and PATH train. I obsessively washed my hands at work and at home, and monitored myself for any signs of symptoms. I began to feel a sense of impending dread for my communities.

I'm fortunate. As my colleagues and I began working from home in mid-March (we optimistically believed we'd be back in the office within a couple of weeks), we adapted well enough and supported one another along the way. I barely came into contact with anyone after coming home from Manhattan that final time for two weeks, fearful I was carrying the virus without exhibiting symptoms. This still terrifies me.

Once at home in Newark, I stopped taking public transportation. I watched Governor Murphy's briefings regularly. I purchased a mask. I donated money and checked in with my friends and family back in Michigan. Mostly, though, I grieved for what was to come.

Masks began to litter my neighborhood in the North Ward. Lines stretch outside of dollar stores. Partitions were installed in my local grocery store to act as a barrier between cashiers and customers, and gloves are required in addition to masks. Although I was taking walks in Branch Brook Park at the beginning of the shut down, I maintained my distance and even went so far as to walk in the street to avoid contact with my neighbors, lest I be a carrier. When the parks closed, I relied on live virtual sets from my some of my favorite Detroit DJs to keep me moving. I started video calls with my nieces and nephews. I tried to read but couldn't concentrate. I checked in with people and slowly regained the motivation to organize and envision what the future may hold.

On April 13, I looked outside my apartment window to see a nearly perfect rainbow stretching across the sky. This was a month into quarantine, in which healthcare workers and UPS workers alike were lauded as "frontline heroes," and I had stayed inside except to purchase groceries or for fresh air. As rainbow art projects sprang up on doors and windows across the U.S. and the world, this real-life symbol of hope, which was visible from Newark to New York City, helped me breathe for the first time in weeks.

I grew up in Detroit (or Wa-we-a-tun-ong), where the motto is, “We hope for better things; it shall arise from the ashes.” It was written by Father Gabriel Richard after he watched the city burn to the ground in 1805, and bears reflection in the current context. As we grieve and plan for what’s to come, may we also hope—and work-towards a more equitable and healthy future for all of us.

